

# SKIN SELF-EXAMINATION

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Performing your own examination of your skin is important as most physical exams do not include an overall check of your skin on a regular basis. Your skin exam should be performed monthly and may take about 10–15 minutes. Two types of skin cancer (basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma) are almost always cured once correctly diagnosed. With melanoma (the most serious type of skin cancer) early diagnosis is essential to start treatment before it spreads. Along with your self-exam, always practice sun-protection care by using an effective sunscreen (SPF of 15 or higher), wearing protective clothing, and limiting exposure time to the sun.

Get to know your skin, so you know what is normal for you. The first time you do the self examination, locate all moles, warts, birthmarks, scars, spots, bumps, lumps, or other skin markings. It may be difficult to remember the color, shape and size of each, so you may want to write down the information or draw a sketch of each area and abnormality.

## **Monthly examination routine:**

After undressing completely, look at your body in a full length mirror in a well-lighted room. Have a spouse help you to check the parts of your body that are difficult to see or use a large hand mirror (a magnifying hand mirror may be helpful).

## **Visual exam:**

- Look for any changes in the size, shape, or color of moles, warts, birthmarks, scars, or other skin markings; and look for new moles or sores.
- Lift your scalp hair and look at the skin underneath.
- Look at your face, neck and ears closely in the mirror. This area is prone to skin damage from the sun. Men with facial hair should look at the skin underneath.
- Look at your arms and hands (back and front), including fingernails. Dark spots under the nail can be an early sign of melanoma.
- Examine buttocks, legs, feet and toenails. Use the hand mirror to view the areas not easily seen. Be sure you look at the bottom of the feet and between your toes.
- Look at your chest, abdomen.

## **Touch exam:**

- Run your fingers over your whole body including your scalp (hair and bald spots). Feel for any lumps, bumps, or rough spots.
- Feel the back of your arms and shoulders carefully (these are areas susceptible to sun damage).
- Notice particularly if there is any bleeding, itching, tenderness or pain in or near a mole.

## **Call our office if:**

- You find any noticeable change in a mole or wart, or other skin marking.
- You have a new or unexplained skin lump, ulcer, or unhealed sore that has appeared since your last examination.
- You have an unusual or changing skin spot in an area of irritation or sun-damaged skin.